



## Lesson Plans—Implementing them Effectively, Managing without them

DID YOU  
KNOW



“Stay away from crossword puzzles, word searches and tired games...Instead, look for activities that provide value and are age-appropriate. Think math activities, collaborative activities and language arts sheets that make learning fun but also worthwhile.”

### First Things First..

As a substitute educator, there are some basics that you need to accomplish when first arriving at your assignment. These include, but are not limited to checking in at the office, wearing any badge or ID that is required, being aware of proper security procedures, greeting students as they arrive, etc.

Sure, keeping kids safe and being prepared is a big part of your responsibility. **But so is implementing the lesson plan the teacher has left for you and continuing academic flow and student learning.**

Teachers have a great deal to accomplish in a short period of time. In most states *common core* standards and objectives are required and should be applied. A day with a substitute instructor is an active learning day in the schools of today. No more do substitutes play movies for entertainment or allow a ‘free day’ in the absence of the permanent teacher. You are a professional, a role model, an educator, and the students should recognize this and treat you accordingly—which they will if you conduct your actions with confidence and preparation.

#### The Lesson Plan

In the vast majority of cases, the permanent teacher will have left you with a lesson plan that guides the learning objectives for the day or period of time. Details will vary by the teacher, subject matter, grade level, and specific needs of the students as well as any mandatory state or school requirements.

The best lesson plans will include instructional sequences, equipment/resources needed, time allotted, formative assessments, activities, and even instructional modifications which can help the instructor apply the material to a wide range of learner types. If you google the term “lesson plan” you’ll find examples of different types you may run across. As a substitute educator **it is your responsibility to implement and conduct the lesson plan left by the permanent teacher, and not make up your own or ad lib the process.** This may vary for a long term assignment where an experienced substitute may be involved. We are fortunate to have thousands of experienced substitute educators on our team; if you are one of them, thank you!

If you don’t fully understand an objective or sequence in the lesson plan, you can omit it and circle back to it, or seek the input of a neighboring teacher for assistance. Another tactic is to extend one of the other assignments to keep students focused. Whatever you do, it is important to note your progress, or setbacks, in the teachers report. (You are leaving a detailed follow-up report for the teacher, right?)

#### What? No Lesson Plan?

One of the biggest complaints of a substitute teacher is when there is no lesson plan left for them. Sometimes the illness or absence may be last minute, leaving no time for preparation. Regardless of the reason, here’s what to do when no lesson plan has been left for you:

1. Don’t panic. [You can handle this!](#)
2. Contact the front office—ask for guidance (see next page for how to do this!)
3. Contact a neighboring teacher
4. Is there a previous days lesson plan available upon which you can build or review?
5. As a last resort, ask the class what they were working on.
6. Create a topical writing lesson as a ‘do now’ activity. Teaching history? Have the class write an essay on what they feel is the most important historical event! For more inspiration see: <http://writingprompts.tumblr.com>

#### Avoid sensitive topics

If you are forced to ‘ad lib’ discussion or writing assignments, **avoid topics like religion, politics and even current headlines.** Raising issues in such sensitive areas can lead to disaster and are best avoided. Keep your topics of discussion appropriate.

Stay away from crossword puzzles, word searches and tired games. These are things that students have seen plenty of times before and can finish in a short amount of time. Instead, look for activities that provide value and are age-appropriate. Think math activities, collaborative activities and language arts sheets that make learning fun but also worthwhile.

Curious about lesson plans and want to see some examples? Check out this [Teacher.org](#) link for ideas for all subjects and grade levels!

## Lesson Plans: Advice, Best Practices

### Other Practical Advice

If you substitute often enough, chances are it's a matter of *when*, not *if*, you are going to run into difficulty implementing the lesson plan. Here are some tips that you may find helpful:

### No Lesson Plan? Be Professional

Generally speaking, it is in the best interest of all the faculty that you are successful as a substitute. The school should want to help. **If you end up in an assignment where there is no lesson plan, do not 'make a scene', do not get belligerent, do not try to find fault.** Instead, make it through the day using one of the techniques described previously. When you inquire at the office, say something like **"I have some filler activities that I could use to get through the day, but I suspect the absent teacher would prefer the students have their day spent on the current curriculum"**. This lets the school know that you are capable, and have the students best interest in mind.



### It's About the Students

Upon conclusion of the assignment where no lesson plan was left for you, professionally make note of the concern and how it impacted the students in your daily report. It's not about you or the stress put upon you; it's about the *students* who did not benefit from a full learning day due to the lack of lesson plan. If you calmly and professionally point out how this negatively impacted the students, and what could have been done to prevent it, the school is more likely to address the issue. Let your Kelly branch know of the concern as well—they have relationships with the district that can be leveraged to fix the problem. **Remember that you must not disparage the school or their policy even if you disagree with it. At all times remain professional and courteous.**

If a substitute teacher doesn't set the tone from the first bell, the students will.

### Deliver the Lesson Skillfully & Impactful

Once again, it is your objective to facilitate delivery of the lesson plan intended by the permanent teacher. Not all students function at the same cognitive level and may have difficulty with comprehension. You will learn to recognize when this occurs by observing facial expressions, body language, and the type of questions asked by the students. **You do this by moving about the room continually as students are working on the assignment—not sitting at the teachers desk waiting for them to finish.**

Ask questions as you circulate — "Are there any questions about what we're doing here?" "Is anyone having difficulty?" Write a brief outline of what the class is doing on the board. Ensure everyone knows what the class is doing, and how long they have to do it. **Not only does this help you deliver the lesson, moving about the room helps stop misbehavior before it begins.** Proximity is key; use it to your advantage and you'll find that students will sense that you mean business. At the same time, show respect for the students. It comes from your body language, your facial expressions, and your verbal language. Treat students with the same level of respect that you expect.

### Differentiate the Assignment

If the assignment is too difficult, *differentiate* it by breaking it up into core components. For example, if the task calls for students to compare and contrast the causes of two different wars, bring the cognitive level down a notch by asking them to list the causes of one war at a time. Then compare the two resulting lists. Diverse backgrounds and abilities make this simple technique helpful and necessary in order for all students to effectively learn.

### Have Some Tricks Up Your Sleeve

If the world were perfect, you wouldn't need to overly prepare by having your own 'ready to go' activity. But, it's not. It's a good idea for you as a substitute to have some age-appropriate things to do for your students when there is no lesson plan left by the teacher. This is a bit more difficult for the high school classes, but generally those students have text books and an outline to follow for what they're supposed to do. For the K-6 crowd, there are plenty of ideas and videos on the internet. In a future *Sub Training Tip* article, we'll document some ideas you can use!